



Feeding wild birds can be a very rewarding winter garden party experience, if you invite the right guests. Providing a nice setting, appropriate dinnerware, and good food will show your feathered garden guests a good time from October until late spring. Uninterrupted feeding is very important as any change in location or availability will force your bird guests to change their feeding habits. Once that happens, they may not return to your party if they have found another.

A nice setting for birds will vary from species to species but a few things are good across the board. Selecting species appropriate houses and feeders is a good first step to inviting to specific bird populations. When placing these, look for areas that have a bit of cover and are out of severe winds. Cover should be enough for the birds but not enough to be inviting to any of the neighborhood felines. Nuisance birds generally do not like human activity or hanging feeders – so using some hanging feeders placed near activity will help reduce their presence. Evergreen and deciduous shrubs and trees can provide good cover and berries – which are a high caloric food source. Try using a number of feeders, it will keep competition at a minimum, encourage more birds to feed and reduce the disease pressure. Be aware that keeping all feeders clean is extremely important in the prevention and spread of diseases. A thorough weekly cleaning, with a 10% bleach solution, will help to keep the feeders free from problems. One disease that is on everyone's mind is Avian Flu. As of the time of this writing, there have been no reported cases in the US. But if you are concerned with the potential for contracting this virus from wild birds - although highly unlikely to happen - wear disposable gloves and a face mask while following reasonable fecal disposal precautions during the feeding and cleaning processes. Be sure to follow up with a warm water and soap hand washing.

When looking at foods to serve your feathered garden guests, do a bit of homework to figure out which birds you want to invite and choose that food appropriately. Keep in mind that many of the readily available, premixed choices can be comprised of seeds that will discourage feeding by desirable birds and encourage nuisance birds. Watch out for mixes that contain high numbers of seeds like

peanut kernels, hulled oats, flax and rape seeds as these are less palatable to those more desirable bird species. Buying only those seeds which the birds will eat will help to eliminate the uneaten waste – or - what is often called the invitation to rodents of all types. How much seed can you expect to buy for the year? The figure given out is about 50 pounds for an urban setting and about 500 pounds for rural areas - buying in bulk can definitely be a cost savings in the long run. To store seeds, use metal or heavy gauge plastic containers with tight fitting lids and place in a dry location. Moderate temperature is good for storage, but moisture is not. Mold is dangerous to birds so check your bird food periodically for any signs of mold and discard any icky seed. Birds are classified as either seed eaters - which enjoy a variety of different seeds including black oil sunflowers, niger thistle seed, finely cracked corn, and proso millets - or insect/meat eaters, which enjoy suet, bacon fat, peanut butter, and seeds. Suet can be obtained from beef or deer, and can be fed plain or melted and mixed with seeds like hulled sunflower, hulled peanuts, cracked corn or oatmeal. Peanut butter can be used when mixed with suet – if used alone it can cause problems for the birds. Table scraps (never anything chocolate - the theobromine that is harmful to cats and dogs is also toxic to birds) or bread can be used alone or with suet. BUT, these are not the most desirable of foods as they have a tendency to attract nuisance birds to the feeders.

Providing a continuous source of water will make your yard more desirable and will draw more birds. In this frozen winter wonderland, that can be interesting to accomplish. Never fear - there are fantastic water heating coils (available in all sizes) that can be placed and left in the bird bath or pool to keep the water thawed and ready for bird use. Grit is another necessary component of a bird's diet that you can provide. It is readily available from farm stores and co-ops. Poultry grit is good for the larger bird species while canary grit will do nicely for all of the smaller species. Again, continuous provision will keep the birds coming to your yard. If you choose to provide both or either water and grit, they should be placed close to, but always separate from, the feeding areas.

What are the specific likes of some of the more common

birds? American Goldfinch – hulled and black-oil sunflowers, niger thistle; *Blue Jay – black striped, gray striped and black-oil sunflowers, peanut kernels; *Brown-headed cowbird – canary seed, white proso millet, red proso millet, German millet; Cardinal – safflower seeds, all sunflower seeds; Chickadee – hulled and all other sunflower seeds, peanut kernels, suet; *Common Grackle – finely cracked corn, hulled sunflower seeds; Dark-eyed Junco – canary seed, finely cracked corn, red proso millet, white proso millet; Evening Grosbeak – cracked corn, all sunflower seeds; *House Sparrow – canary seed, white proso millet, German millet; Mourning Dove – white proso millet, German millet, niger thistle, black-oil sunflower seeds; Purple Finch – whole sunflowers seeds, hulled sunflower seeds, red proso millet, white proso millet, German millet; Song Sparrow – red proso millet, white proso millet; *Starling – table scraps, peanut kernels, hulled oats; Tree Sparrow – finely cracked corn, red proso millet, white proso millet; Tufted Titmouse – peanut kernels, all sunflower seeds, suet; White-crowned Sparrow – black-oil sunflower seeds, hulled sunflower seeds, sunflower pieces, red proso millet, white proso millet, peanut kernels, niger thistle seed; White-throated Sparrow – same as white-crowned; * - not generally a desirable bird to invite to the garden party.

If you would like more information on feeding wild birds, stop in at a nature center or retail location specializing in bird goodies, browse your local library or check out the following websites:

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu>

<http://www.audobon.org>